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ABSTRACT

The 1989-90 Teacher Research and Computer Training Center Statewide Evaluation focused on the specific impact of six exemplary teacher center projects on teachers, schools, and students; 10 theme areas were identified for research. Evaluations were based on longitudinal, qualitative case studies of exemplary programs that have positively affected teacher education, interprofessional relationships among teachers, and the development of educational resources. Results of the study indicate that teacher centers reflect supportive and complementary relationships between the centers and their participating school districts. It is further noted that the impact of teacher centers on teachers has been positive not only for the teachers themselves, but also for the school community and the students. Although the six centers are not named, detailed information on their organizational context and operations is provided, as well as several recommendations for continued excellence and future research. (DB)

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EXECUTIVE

SUMMARY

NEW YORK STATE TEACHER RESOURCE AND COMPUTER TRAINING CENTER PROGRAM

EVALUATION

REPORT

1989-90

THE UNIVERSITY
OF THE STATE
OF NEW YORK

THE STATE
EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT

OFFICE OF HIGHER
AND CONTINUING
EDUCATION

ALBANY, NY

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OFFICE OF TEACHING

ALBANY, NY 12234

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ABSTRACT

Evaluation Focus

The 1989-90 Teacher Resource and Computer Training Center Statewide Evaluation focused on describing the specific impact of six exemplary teacher center projects on teachers, schools, and students. Ten theme areas were identified for research.

Evaluation Methodology

Longitudinal, qualitative case studies were the methodology used to collect data for the evaluation. Each case study focused on one exemplary project, defined as a specific identifiable teacher center activity. The six teacher centers whose projects were selected for study were previously identified as effective organizations in the 1988-89 Statewide Teacher Center Evaluation Study.

Conclusion Highlights

The effectiveness of teacher centers studied in 1989-90 reflected

- supportive and complementary relations between teacher centers and their participating school districts
- a maturity of operations
- a systematic communications structure

The impact of teacher centers on teachers, schools, school districts, and students indicates that exemplary projects

- offered expanded roles for teachers
- significantly impacted school culture
- positively influenced students involved in the project

Future Directions

Future evaluation efforts will focus on documenting teacher center impact on students. Student impact information, together with the results of the statewide evaluation studies conducted over the past five years, will provide a comprehensive picture of the impact of centers on teachers, learners, and the profession of education in New York State.

TEACHER RESOURCE AND COMPUTER TRAINING CENTERS

Teacher Resource and Computer Training Centers (TRCTCs) were established by the New York State Legislature in 1984 in order to provide systematic, ongoing professional education services to the State's teachers. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis to school districts, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), or consortia of two or more school districts and/or BOCES.

The initial appropriation of $3.5 million established 44 teacher centers throughout the State. The program has grown to $21.5 million in 1989, supporting 103 teacher centers.

There are six statutory purposes of teacher centers:

(1) Assist teachers, diagnose learning needs, experiment with the use of multiple instructional approaches, assess student outcomes, assess staff development needs and plans, and train other school personnel in effective pedagogical approaches.

(2) Provide demonstration and training sites where teachers are trained, specifically in the use of computers as teaching aides; the criteria for school acquisition and use of computer equipment and software; and the evaluation of computer-related materials.

(3) Develop and produce curricula and curricular material designed to meet the educational needs of the students being served through application of educational research or new or improved methods, practices, and techniques.

(4) Provide training to improve the skills of teachers in order to enable such teachers to meet the special educational needs of the pupils they serve, and to familiarize such teachers with developments in curriculum formulation and educational research, including the manner in which the research can be used to improve teaching skills.

(5) Provide a location where teachers may share resources, ideas, methods and approaches directly related to classroom instruction, and become familiar with current teaching materials and products for use in their classrooms.

(6) Retrain teachers and other education personnel to become better qualified to teach in subject areas necessary to prepare students for the developing high technology era, in the disciplines of mathematics, science, and computer technology.

The 1989-1990 evaluation of the New York State teacher centers primarily focused on studying the educational impact of six selected teacher center programs on teacher roles and behaviors, classrooms and schools, and students. This was the fourth year the teacher centers were evaluated statewide. The three earlier studies focused on *describing* the general operating characteristics and outcomes of the teacher centers. Information was obtained about the nature of program activities, policy board meetings, school district relations, and center processes. Surface perceptions were gathered also on center impact on teachers, schools, and students. Mailed surveys and one- or two-day case site visits were the techniques used to collect data. All three earlier studies helped describe teacher center practices, concerns, and needs, and laid the groundwork for undertaking a much more defined study of the educational impact of the centers.

This year's evaluation design focused on describing the specific impact of six exemplary teacher center projects on teachers, schools, and students. The evaluation researchers spent between 7 and 12 days at each site beginning in December, 1989, and ending in June, 1990. The six projects and the teacher centers in which they operated were purposefully selected as effective organizations and projects so that impact would be more visible and data more useful, detailed, and concrete. The goal of this year's study was to provide more comprehensive data on teacher center project impact *on the teacher* because teacher development is the primary goal of teacher centers. It is hoped that this study will, in time, lay the foundation for a more focused assessment of the impact of teacher development on student performance and behavior. The Statewide Teacher Center Evaluation Advisory Committee envisions future evaluation studies being able to focus on measurable educational outcomes.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

To collect the data for the study, longitudinal qualitative case studies were designed for six selected effective teacher centers and their nominated exemplary projects. The teacher centers which were selected were initially screened to be effective organizations (see next paragraph for a description of the criteria used in screening the teacher centers). Data collected about the teacher centers, therefore, were secondary to the study and used to confirm the center's effectiveness. **The exemplary project, defined as a specific identifiable teacher activity of the center, was the focal point around which all the educational impact information was collected.**

To narrow down the number of projects to be studied to six (the number determined to be feasible given evaluation resources), three screening procedures were followed by the two researchers who were involved in coordinating the case site visits for the 1989-1990 evaluation. In the first step, each researcher applied the following criteria to screen each project. Only those projects which were perceived as multidimensional (i.e., their design had three or more component parts), representative of either traditional teacher activities and roles (i.e., they focused on teaching effectiveness and curriculum development) or new teacher leadership roles (i.e., they focused on increased teacher involvement in school decision making); and likely to impact school culture practices and operations were selected for further consideration. Thirteen projects were selected at this step.

In the second step, each of the 13 teacher centers which nominated these projects were assessed to see whether they were viewed as effective organizations. The findings from the 1988-1989 statewide evaluation study had generated a ranking of the effectiveness of 87 teacher centers using the following effectiveness criteria: perceived high staff morale, clear center vision or mission, established operating policies and procedures, established needs assessment and program evaluation procedures, active and competent teacher center director, functional policy board, cooperative relations with participating school districts, and positive impact on teachers, students, and schools. Eight of the 13 exemplary projects were located in teacher centers which were ranked in the top 50 percent of the 87 ranked teacher centers.

In the third step, the researchers selected the final six projects in terms of whether they represented teacher center demographic heterogeneity. The final six projects existed in single district and consortium teacher centers, downstate and upstate locations, and rural, suburban, and urban settings.

In November, 1989, the six teacher centers with the projects to be studied were notified and asked to participate in the study. Their first task was to identify up to ten teacher participants in the project whom the researchers could follow for about six months. At the same time, six different project researchers (one for each center and project) were selected and trained.

The overall design for the case site studies described a role for a primary and secondary researcher at each case site. The primary project researcher spent at least 6 to 10 days observing the different project activities. Secondary researchers (the project coordinators) spent an additional day or two at each site assisting the primary researchers in collecting site data. All project evaluation visits took place between December 1, 1989, and June 10, 1990.

A variety of data-collecting instruments and tools were developed and used at each site. Some of the instruments were developed by the researchers *and* some were developed by teacher center project staff. In general, the primary researchers:

- interviewed the selected teacher participants, external school administrators, and other teachers and students who were familiar with the project at each site,
- observed the behavior or activities of teacher participants working in project-related activities,
- interviewed teacher center staff and directors,
- attended center meetings and/or classes with teacher participants,
- collected representative teacher center documents, and
- observed the physical space and resources possessed by the center and/or project.

REPORT FORMAT

The report will focus on the following 10 research-derived theme areas which are viewed as critical factors in understanding the effectiveness of the exemplary projects:

Theme 1. Relationship Between Teacher Center and Participating School Districts

Theme 2. Organizational Effectiveness of Teacher Centers

Theme 3. Teacher Center's Role in Center/Project Communication and Networking Activities

Theme 4. Project Impact on Teacher Growth in Educational Leadership Roles

Theme 5. Project Impact on Traditional Teacher Role

Theme 6. Project Impact on School Culture

Theme 7. Project Impact on Participating/School District(s) Operations

Theme 8. Significant Components of Project History

Theme 9. Project Integration Across K-12 Level

Theme 10. Project Impact on Students

The first three themes (Relationship, Organizational Effectiveness, and Center Role in Communication) were studied because they were viewed as critical factors in assessing whether an organization was effective or not. For the projects to have visible impact, the centers in which the projects were operating needed to be confirmed as effective organizations.

Themes four and five (Project Impact on Teacher Growth in Educational Leadership Roles and Traditional Teacher Roles) were studied *and emphasized* because teacher professional development is viewed as the primary goal for all teacher centers.

Theme six (Project Impact on School Culture) was studied because change to the teacher cannot always be sustained *unless* the culture of the schools is also influenced to be more supportive of staff development for teachers and teachers working with teachers.

Theme seven (Project Impact on School District Operations) was studied because it was hypothesized that effective projects (of any kind) over time impact more than the individuals with whom they come into contact. Another gauge of the effectiveness of a project, therefore, is the assessment of its impact on school goals, operations, or decisions. This is true even for a project targeted to a specific course, program, or grade level.

Theme eight (Significant Components of Project History) was studied to see the degree to which the exemplary projects were initiated and implemented by the teachers themselves. Projects with grass roots support were hypothesized to be more effective over time.

Theme nine (Project Integration Across the K-12 Level) was studied to see whether the project (even when it focused on one level) was integrated into other school levels. The researchers believed that an effective K-12 school program was composed of integrated modules of instruction and teachers who were not isolated in their classrooms or subject areas. The researchers hypothesized that a project which had lasting impact would be integrated across all K-12 levels. At the very least, teachers would be aware of the program. At the very most, they would adjust or adapt their own activities as appropriate.

Theme 10 (Project Impact on Students) was studied to see whether the projects' impact on students could be measured. This theme was selected to see how far centers had evolved in being able to demonstrate student outcomes.

PROFILE OF THE EXEMPLARY PROJECTS AND TEACHER CENTERS

The six exemplary projects selected for the 1989-1990 evaluation effort represented a wide variety of teacher center activities. The projects ranged from curriculum projects designed to improve the effectiveness of teaching in specific school content areas (e.g., language and science) to an educational process project designed to improve teaching skills; to teacher role change projects designed to provide teachers with opportunities for curriculum development, peer coaching, staff development, and project leadership. In most of the projects teachers across several grade levels were involved.

All the exemplary projects were multifaceted. They were not designed as a single focus (i.e., a six-week training program); rather they were designed with complementary and supporting elements. For example, a six-week training program would be designed with pre- and post-tests, prescribed counseling on an individual workshop participant's performance, instructor coaching follow-ups, a six- month refresher, and school support group meetings to assist teachers in continuing to experiment with the training ideas.

All the projects in the mature teacher centers (those which have operated for five or more years) had a life of their own beyond the teacher center. Although they relied on the teacher center for some fiscal resources, meeting and work space, and newsletter and letter communication links, the projects had informal or formal teacher leaders who carried out administrative and support functions for the project.

The projects existed in single districts and consortiums, in sparsely populated areas and more heavily dense urban areas. Four of the six projects existed in teacher centers which had been operating before the 1984 New York State Teacher Resource and Computer Training Center legislation provided state funding, while two existed in teacher centers which had been developed within the last three years in response to the legislative initiative.

The six teacher centers were also multifaceted, providing the full-range of services characteristic of most teacher centers in New York. The teacher centers offered minigrants (i.e., small stipends to teachers to assist them in carrying out a specific activity) and many workshop and course offerings, and had resource libraries, computer networking hookups and on-line information exchange systems. The centers were all in physically attractive and accessible settings and had meeting and classroom spaces available for center, school, and community use.

The exemplary project in Site A is located in one of the largest teacher center consortiums in New York. It has participating rural, suburban, and urban school districts. The project is a *high-technology science project* impacting secondary level biology teachers. Science teachers in this project engage in regularly scheduled meetings held throughout the year. Before implementing the two-week science course the teacher needs to attend workshop and laboratory training events to learn how to use the equipment and carry out the procedures. All teachers receive a newsletter communication from the center. Resident "expert" teachers share their expertise with other teachers in the consortium (as needed). About 20-30 teachers and 200-300 students have been involved in the 2 years of the project.

The exemplary project in Site B is located in a single district teacher center in an urban area. The project is a *teacher staff developer project*. Eight teachers, who receive a small stipend and 20 to 40 percent release time from teaching, assist teachers (especially new teachers) in their own content-related areas. The staff developers provide technical research (i.e., they develop a specific lesson plan or audio-visual aid on a topic) and teaching assistance (i.e., they role-play a teaching technique) both inside and outside the classroom. The staff developers meet monthly. All but one are paid by the school district. Department heads plan department activities with the staff developers.

The exemplary project in Site C is located in a small- to medium- sized teacher center consortium in a rural area. The project involves a large variety of projects related to *environmental education*. The project's many activities involve teachers in meeting and working together on curriculum development and video design, setting up binational visitation exchange, developing paired school partnership information exchanges, designing and implementating staff development training programs, and determining current and

future directions for the teacher center in environmental education areas. The teacher center has a very close and productive relationship (it shares space, resources, materials, staff, and plans) with a cooperating state-funded agency. Most of the teachers working on this project(about 21 were observed) receive release time from their district to attend project meetings held at the center. These teachers play a "leadership" not a "follower" role in the development of the environmental projects.

The exemplary project in Site D is located in a single district teacher center in a heavily populated suburban area. The project involves 10 teachers in a *project leadership role*. The teachers all received minigrants to develop center-related activities. This leadership position offers teachers the opportunity to assume new responsibilities and to participate in the educational decision-making process. Teacher Project Leaders are developing the following programs:

Project I involves a teacher in setting up a networking program designed to support and encourage teachers in continuing their professional development and sharing successful classroom-based programs and ideas.

Project II involves two teachers in researching, designing, and developing grants for the teacher center and school district.

Project III involves a teacher in researching and developing methods for teachers to communicate more effectively with parents in the community.

Project IV involves a teacher computer network specialist in representing the teacher center and district at regional computer meetings and in planning, developing, and implementing network services to interested teachers.

Project V involves a teacher in publishing a teacher center newsletter to keep staff members informed about programs, grants, and courses.

Project VI involves a teacher in developing a collection of outstanding lesson plan ideas for each subject area.

Project VII involves a teacher in working at building a Teacher Center Resource Center by recommending materials to be included and arranging for retrieval of materials through the teacher center library and computer.

Project VIII involves a teacher in researching, designing, and helping implement a Substance Abuse Intervention Program for the district.

Project IX involves a teacher in developing an Arts in Education Program. In this project, the teacher acts as a liaison between the teacher center and the various arts coordinators in the district.

The exemplary project in Site E is located in a single district teacher center in a suburban area. The project is a *curriculum model for language teaching* with middle school children below, at, and above grade level. The project involves curriculum design, in-service education, and support and follow-up activities for middle and secondary school language teachers. This curriculum model was developed by the district's entire foreign language staff and serves as a model for other school district's in-service programs. Teachers from other districts also have participated in the project. The language model which was developed and implemented was a proficiency-based foreign language curriculum with an established mentor program for teachers of the modified language classes. Extensive retraining of foreign language teachers in the new approach to teaching language, and development of instructional materials and proficiency-based test items, are major outcomes of this exemplary project.

The exemplary project in Site F is located in a single district teacher center in a suburban area. The project focuses on a *model of effective teaching* which has been developed and modified to fit the district's needs. The project involves a 15 week training program, a peer coach to provide follow-up support, refresher workshops, and building support groups. Almost 100 percent of the school district's teachers have taken the program. The peer coach works full-time to assist teachers applying effective teaching concepts in their classrooms. The program is mandated for all new teachers. Many of the district administrators have also taken the course as well.

CONCLUSIONS

This section presents the researcher-derived conclusions to the 1989-1990 statewide teacher center evaluation study. The conclusions are organized around the 10 themes which were used to frame the discussion of the 6 exemplary projects. Given the small number of teacher centers, projects and respondents, caution is urged in generalizing the findings beyond the sample of centers, projects, and respondents studied.

The first three conclusions relate to the effectiveness of the teacher centers, while the last seven conclusions relate to the impact of the exemplary project on teachers, schools, school districts, and students.

1. **Relations between the selected teacher centers and their participating school districts are supportive and complementary.** The participating school districts seem to recognize the importance of teacher centers. The participating school districts provide teacher centers with in-kind support, resources for teacher release time, teacher substitutes, staff, and space. The older exemplary projects have been assimilated by school districts, because they reflect district goals. As is to be expected, the most mature and experienced teacher centers are viewed as equal partners in staff development activities for district teachers.

2. **The teacher centers studied in 1989-1990 are effective organizations.** Major differences in effectiveness among them relate to their organizational life stage. Mature teacher centers have structures, systems, and networks in place, and their directors have more time for proactive and reflective thinking/planning. Newer teacher centers don't have these structures, systems, and networks in place and their directors must be involved in many more immediate activities and tasks. Project success, however, will impact their effectiveness. As these projects become successful, demands for expansion will require additional resources which are not readily available.

3. **Teacher center directors in all the teacher centers have developed standard communication structures and mechanisms to promote their programs and activities to the educational communities they serve.** These networks have been extremely helpful in supporting the initial development of the exemplary projects. Teacher centers have not developed these same connections, however, to the local businesses or communities. These community groups could be important constituent groups for the projects.

4. **The exemplary projects have all offered teachers opportunities for growth in educational leadership roles.** Teachers who get involved in the projects develop greater self-confidence, more comfort in group activities, and expertise in peer coaching skills. They take leadership roles in district activities such as curriculum development, program change, and workshop and program presentations. Increasing their networking with other teachers, they have developed collegial relationships which are helping to break down the culture of teacher isolation.

5. **The exemplary projects have all significantly impacted the traditional teacher role.** Teachers who get actively involved in the projects improve their process and content teaching skills, improve their skills in technical areas related to the specialized curriculum, and report enhanced job satisfaction and more ownership of school projects or programs, and increase their interest in trying new teaching methods and techniques.

6. **The exemplary projects have all significantly impacted school culture.** All projects have either influenced the way in which teachers relate to each other, increased teacher communication, or increased teacher respect for colleagues, educational administrators, and external specialists and parents.

7. **The exemplary projects have partially impacted school district operations.** All of the projects were viewed as having goals complementary to the school district goals. The projects influenced how courses are taught, or how teachers are supervised. Participating school districts received positive publicity from the project.

8. **The effectiveness, image, and perceived success of the teacher center is very important to all beginning projects.** The teacher center projects studied this year were exemplary because of the initial support they received from an effective teacher center, active director, and the grass roots support and work they received from the teachers, themselves.

9. **Most of the projects are at the early stages of integration across the K-12 level.** Only one project has been integrated by teachers in both the elementary and secondary levels.

10. **Students who were involved in the exemplary projects were positively influenced.** Students attitudes towards teachers, school courses, and school were enhanced. Students found the project courses to be challenging, innovative, and exciting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This final section presents the researcher-derived recommendations from the statewide teacher center evaluation study. All recommendations evolved from the research findings and conclusions and are presented in order of the theme's presentation in the body of the report.

- **Teacher centers should not solely rely on the New York State Education Department or participating school districts for their traditional resources and supports.** Teacher centers should develop more relationships with local small businesses and community organizations which are capable of providing needed resources and supports. These fiscal resources could be extremely valuable to centers who find their districts cutting center supports in light of budget setbacks.
- **In addition to the assistance provided by the New York State Education Department, the mature teacher centers and their directors may want to pair up with the newer centers and directors to help them develop needed structures and systems.** These systems need to be in place before directors can proactively and strategically plan their futures.
- **Once teacher centers have developed routine and effective communication networks within the school community, they should focus on developing center contacts with the local small businesses and community.** These contacts in time may provide needed fiscal supports. Teacher centers should ask teachers to systematically develop project information presentations to teachers in all schools and to encourage the sharing of professional ideas.
- **Teacher centers should continue to develop projects and activities which assist teachers in becoming more proficient in the classroom.** As this happens, teachers will then be more secure in expanding their role outside the classroom.
- **Teacher centers should continue to develop projects and activities which assist teachers in expanding their role beyond that of a classroom instructor of students.** Teachers need to continue to develop their roles in peer coaching, curriculum design, school district decision making, and in staff development leadership.
- **Effective teacher center projects impact school culture and operations.** Projects which have grass roots support and multiple/complex designs are most likely to be effective. A steering group of interested teachers across all building levels should be set up in each center to identify, develop, and critique project ideas which could potentially influence school culture.
- **Teacher center directors assume important roles in supporting teacher staff development projects.** The supports they provide in the early stage of project development set the stage for later success and diffusion. Teacher center directors need to view part of their role responsibilities as encouraging teachers (and others) to present their ideas to the teacher center, as finding ways (through the networks they developed within and outside the educational community) to fiscally support some of the more promising projects, making sure that teachers take the lead (not the director, center staff, or school administrators) in developing the project once the supports are in place.
- **All teacher centers should consider developing one or two projects which they believe could impact all K-12 teachers.** These projects could be process projects (i.e., effective teaching, whole language, cultural thinking, research skills, or writing skills) designed to be used by any teacher or content projects (i.e., a new language approach, a new social studies technique) designed to influence the way in which all specialists teach their topics.

  The K-12 curriculum and individual class or subject teachers should not be viewed as separate from each other. Teacher centers should promote project integration as appropriate. Similar projects across centers could be linked (via telecommunications, statewide meetings). Process consultants and specialists in a project area could be hired to work with each set of teacher centers (who have a common project). State Education Department annual or regional meetings focus on the progress the teacher centers (with consultants) are making in developing projects which impact all levels.
- **The State Education Department should encourage all teacher centers to develop procedures to measure teacher impact and student impact data beyond what is typically collected now.** The Teacher Center Statewide Evaluation Advisory Committee could spearhead this activity. Nationally recognized consultant/experts on teacher and student measurement could be brought together at one time for an intensive meeting with the teacher center group to talk about possible designs and measures. The results of this meeting could be used in a follow-up statewide evaluation effort.

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